

## The Carriage Dog Trials

One of the Dalmatian's historic roles was as a carriage dog. They were used to decorate and guard carriage, travellers and their belongings and they had to keep pace with the horses on hard roads over long distances.

The purpose of the Trials is to provide a competition to test the modern dogs' ability to demonstrate the qualities required to be a working carriage dog. Competitors must do a basic obedience test with their dog, from their horse or carriage, followed by an endurance ride or drive of six, twelve or twenty-five miles.

The Trials test the dog's willingness to work, its ability to keep up at speed, and demonstrates that it's under its handler's control. The dog's physical condition is assessed by a vet as part of the test.

Dogs which qualify earn the title of Road or Carriage Dog bronze, silver or gold, depending on the distance covered.

### ***Training your Dalmatian to work with a horse: First steps on the ground***

The first steps in obedience begin when the puppy is eight weeks old. He needs to be settled in to his new home and feel comfortable with his surroundings. This is the ideal time to start training.

All the steps are appropriate for dogs of any age, although the earlier they are started, the easier it is for the puppy to learn.

Dogs are quick to learn by association. So, if the puppy sits and the right word is applied to the action

and suitable reward is given, then before long the dog learns that the word sit means reward and the right action follows.

When you are sure that he knows what the command means, take gentle remedial action to ensure that the dog gets it right if he ignores you. Only give a command once. If you don't he will learn he can ignore you if he wants.

Using his name at all times and generally bonding with your dog is paramount. Play is also important in building up a rapport and this should also be initiated as early as

possible. A soft toy is ideal and the puppy must learn to play in your space and not in his. That means that the play must be near to you.

When training make sure that the sessions are short and mingled with play.

Teaching your dog to come is done with titbits as a lure and if you have a friend who can hold him gently whilst you run away from him calling his name, reward him as he comes to you. At a later stage in training teach him to sit in front of you by raising both your hands close to your bellybutton, combined with the word sit. This can be built up and used in conjunction with the stay exercise to build up the recall.

Teaching the stay must be taught slowly and built up steadily. Start by making sure the dog has learnt the meaning of the word sit and he is happily and relaxed whilst doing so. Introduce the word "Stay" in a quiet but firm voice, and stand beside him for five seconds.

To progress this, add five seconds at a time, until he is happy and confident to sit still for 30 seconds with you beside him. If he breaks at 20 seconds then go back to

15 seconds until you are sure he is steady. Once he is confident at 30 seconds, you progress to the next step.

Work towards a one minute stay in both sit and down. There needs to be a release command at the end of the stay. You must choose a word that works for you, but two pats on the back with the words "OK" may be used. These words can then be applied from horseback or from the carriage to release the dog from a stay position.

Stays are all about the dog having confidence in you, so it is important to keep on bonding with the dog the whole time. Teaching your dog to walk beside you once again is easiest taught at a very young age. Use a word

that means you want him to walk beside you and never change that word. I use the word close as it can mean



close to the horse or close to the vehicle.

Using a titbit or a toy beside your left leg is ideal. A titbit will probably sway a puppy's mind that being beside you brings rewards.

Walking a small left hand circle is an ideal way to practice the "close" position. A left hand circle means that we are herding the dog. Once he understands his position, gradually increase the distance and change of direction. As he grows in confidence introduce straight line working.

Remember, a little good work is ten times better than lots of bad! A few steps at a time and some play as a reward is of great importance. Keep your training fun, be consistent and the end result will be a well trained happy dog and a proud and happy owner.

**Michele Boys**

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### ***Training without a horse***

If you don't have a horse, don't despair! Each time I have competed in the road dog classes, it has been on a borrowed horse and I have done nearly all my

training without one. Get your basic 'on the ground' obedience good first, as it is not too difficult afterwards to transfer it to horseback.

Clearly it is important to accustom your dog to horses. A trip to a local yard, walks on a lead through fields with horses in, or walking out with someone else riding a horse, is a good start.

Take the safety of your dog seriously around horses. Sometimes a bump, a nudge, or a nip is a good lesson learned. But being kicked or trodden on can have dire consequences. You need your dog to keep a respectful distance.

An element of distance control is the most helpful. If you can build on your basic training to get some



control when you and your dog are some distance apart, then this helps replicate you being on horseback.

Just as with the 'on the ground' training, give a command and expect a response. If you don't get that response, you must dismount and make a correction.

For safety, I have used the word "wait" to stop my dog jumping stiles or going through gates. This is the start of some distance control and this can be built on. I have also trained from a standing position on a chair to emulate being high up. I have also used a Springer on my bike.

The Springer is specially designed to enable a cyclist to travel with the dog safely alongside. It is attached to the bike's frame and is built to absorb a strong tug, yet at the same time keeping the dog at a safe distance. It is a good way to reinforce the concept of staying with me as I cycle along.

I use the command "with me" to tell Munin that she must be within a couple of feet of me at any time. When she is attached to the Springer, she cannot move away and this is an ideal



time to associate the "with me" command with the notion of trotting alongside the bike. I reinforce this command with edible treats. The 'Hock' exercise in the Trials means that the dog must stay behind the horse's head. For an exuberant Dalmatian which likes to lead as mine does, this can be difficult. If you're cycling, the front wheel of the bike itself can be used, by turning it in front of a pulling dog, combined with a "get back" command.

In my experience stopping your dog from forging ahead is one of the most difficult things to stop, so any training on the ground or with a bicycle that establishes a "get back" type command will be invaluable. Gently using a riding whip to block your dog going forward can be a helpful tool.

If possible, borrow or hire a horse before the trials to transfer this learning to horseback and consolidate the work from that position in time for the trial.

**Anne Dickens**

### ***Training from horseback***

The more basic obedience training you have done the easier it will be to get your dog to listen to you when you are four foot in the air. If your dog doesn't pay you any attention when you are on the ground, don't expect him to when you are mounted!

Attending a training class is invaluable and although you do not need perfect heeling and straight sits, you will need a dog that responds first time to verbal commands, in all kinds of distracting situations. Will your dog only sit when he is a certain position in the club hall, or will he sit for you in the garden when you are standing on a chair?

From a very young age insist your dog waits for you to go through doorways first. Some of our bold Dalmatians have a tendency to forge in front of the



horse, which is not safe or acceptable in the competition. Teach him to move out of your way at all times, as this helps him become aware of the environment around him.

Keep him on the lead and work hard at teaching him to ignore distractions.

Because Dalmatians love to follow horses and do it naturally, some people think this is enough.

Unfortunately many will also chase the local wildlife 'naturally' so "leave it" is a really important command for the dog to learn.

Lots of work alongside a bike with the dog on a lead is a good way to begin as this helps to establish the position you wish the dog to work in and helps with fitness too.

A long lead can also be used from horseback if the horse is happy with it and the dog has been trained with it from the ground first (always make sure you are able to drop this quickly in an emergency.)

All the time your dog is on a lead he is prevented from disobedience so do not rush this part of training or be too quick to try him working free.

When first training from a horse, make sure the horse is tired and not being skittish, do not expect your dog to take risks and work alongside a horse that is misbehaving.

"Intelligent disobedience" must always be allowed for. If your dog has been told to stay or hock but the horse is posing a threat, the dog must obviously not be punished for moving into a safe zone.



Safety is a priority and it is a good idea to have a command such as "WATCH OUT" which can be shouted in an emergency to alert your dog to dangerous situations. Even so, he may at some point be trodden on. Make sure you are equipped with first aid and a mobile phone when out.

Take care, however fit your dog is, working with a horse requires mental concentration and he will tire quickly in the early days.

Before you enter a trial make contact with your local driving club and ask to go along to a driving event, your horse will see carriages at the trial and if he is very frightened by them it could undo all your good work!

The pleasure you will get from seeing your dog doing what comes naturally will be immense and you will become part of a growing number of people who work their Dalmatians!

**Alison Burgess**

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